HOMER ST. JOHN

PERTH COUNTY, LENS, FLINT AND SAN JOSE · 1900–1972

On Boy Soldiers, Border Crossings and Such

"But you're only a boy, Young Fellow My Lad;
You aren't obliged to go."
"I'm seventeen and a quarter, Dad,
And ever so strong, you know."

ROBERT W. SERVICE, YOUNG FELLOW MY LAD

Daniel knew his grandfather. Homer St. John was a Canadian, a soldier at fifteen, and later a Buick man in Flint and the owner of an apartment house in San Jose. Some of what Daniel knew of him he saw for himself; more came from his father, John, and from his aunt Pat, who both grew up in Homer's house. So did the story of Homer's war, and that, Daniel knew, could be looked up. "We have his records, too," he said. "I looked under the Canadian records." Anyone who went on line would find the serial number, the regiment and its campaigns: "So it's all documented." He was right. The army kept forty-eight pages on Private Homer St. John, and they are set beside the family's story here. Where the two part company, this chapter says so, and kindly.

He was born on March 20, 1900, in Blanshard Township, Perth County, Ontario, a square of level farmland in south-western Ontario that had been surveyed only in 1839, the last township of the Huron Tract to be opened. The soil was so good, a county historian wrote, that by 1848 "every acre was claimed by owners, lessees, or squatters." The settlers were almost all from the north of Ireland, which made the township Protestant and Orange, and that fits what Daniel said of his grandfather: he was "Protestant Irish, Orange Irish, probably some Dutch." By 1911 more than half of Blanshard's 2,227 people were Methodists. "The Methodists, it may be said," wrote the historian, "possess all church property in this township." Homer was one of them.

He was born on the family's own farm. His grandfather, William St. John, had bought the lot, the third lot of the seventh concession of Blanshard, from the Canada Company in 1856, the first man to own it, and had sold it in 1888 to his youngest son, Philip. The next autumn, on Monday, October 16, 1889, Philip St. John "of Blanshard" married Sarah Hunt "of East Nissouri," the township just south, at the house of the Rev. C. O'Meara in St. Marys. Homer was their fourth child.

Two girls, Kathleen and Freda, had come before him, and a boy, Freddie, who had died

THE FAMILY OF HOMER ST. JOHN

William St. John (1821–1904) = Ann Doble (1823–1889)

Philip St. John (1866–1945) = Sarah Hunt (1868–1940), married 1889

Homer Doble St. John (1900–1972) = Alice Rose Pigeon (1900–1983)
His sisters and brother: Kathleen (1891–1968), Freddie (1892–1894), Freda (1896–1992), Phyllis (1908–1996)
Alice was the daughter of Paschal Pigeon and Catherine ("Kitty") Foley, of Stratford

John (1921–2006) — *and so to Daniel*

Patricia, "Pat" (b. c.1923)

Jane (b. c.1933)

Robert John, "Bobby" (1935–1939)

Phillip (b. c.1942)

at two; a last sister, Phyllis, would follow in 1908. His middle name was his grandmother's: she had been Ann Doble. The division registrar wrote him into the county's book of births as "St John Homer Doble," son of Philip St John and Sarah Hunt, and that week the *St. Marys Journal* printed the news in a single line: "ST. JOHN.—In Woodham, on March 20th, to Mr. and Mrs. Philip St. John, a son."

The census of 1881 found both of them at home. Philip, sixteen, was the youngest left on the farm with his parents, William and Ann, and a sister and brother, Ellen and Adam, besides another Sarah. Across the line in East Nissouri there was only one Sarah Hunt, a girl of fourteen, in the household of Frederick Hunt, a farmer of fifty-five born in Ireland, and his wife, also Sarah; she had five brothers and a sister, Emily. The county atlas of 1876 has Frederick Hunt as a freeholder on the eighth concession, post office St. Marys. Nothing yet proves that this girl was Philip's bride, but the township, the age and the name fit, and the first son of the marriage would be named William Frederick.

When he enlisted, Homer gave his address as Woodham, a village on the township's western edge, straddling the boundary road with Usborne Township in Huron County: a grist mill, a saw mill, a pump factory, two general stores and, in 1902, "about 150" people, which is to say about thirty families. For years it had been called simply the Corners. "How this village received its name," confessed its historian, who lived there, "we are unable to say."

A mile and a quarter up the road was Kirkton, where a young Irishman named Timothy Eaton had once kept a store in a log hut before going on to Toronto and the department-store business; the rivalry between Woodham and Kirkton, the historian added, "seems to have passed away." Woodham had a brick Methodist church and a brick Orange hall, whose lodge was known as "the banner lodge of the west." The county atlas of 1879 shows the farm, just below Woodham on the township's western edge, with the name written across it: "W^{m} St. John," a hundred acres.

Perth County lived on milk. Its dairies made the cheese that had "made this county famous everywhere," twenty-five factories of it by 1900,



WOODHAM AND THE ST. JOHN FARM, 1879

nearly all of it bound for England. Its great day was threshing, when "the modern steam thresher, as it screams and roars," came round the farms "tearing the sheaves in pieces with a mouth of steel." It was a countryside that was quietly emptying: Blanshard lost one person in eight between 1901 and 1911, and every rural township in the south of the county shrank in the same ten years.

The market town was St. Marys, the Stone Town, built of its own limestone. And in 1914, when Homer was fourteen, Perth County outside Stratford voted itself dry under the old local-option law. In law, at least, it would stay that way for forty-five years.

One other boy from the township went further. Arthur Meighen had been born on a farm near the hamlet of Anderson in Blanshard in 1874, and by the time Homer was a teenager he was Solicitor General of Canada. In 1917 it would fall to him to steer conscription into law; in 1920 he would become Prime Minister. Blanshard, which had about as many people as a large school, produced both the man who steered the draft law through Parliament and a farm boy who did not wait for one.

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In August 1914 the war came to Canada without anyone in Canada deciding it. When Britain's ultimatum to Germany ran out at midnight on the 4th, the whole Empire was at war, Canada with it, much as Laurier had said it would be: "when Britain is at war, Canada is at war." The country had a permanent army of three thousand men. It cheered anyway. "The men who have cheered the

loudest," the Toronto *Telegram* predicted, "will be among the first to offer their services."

At first the farms were slow to give up their sons; by 1915 the *Canadian Annual Review* was reporting "wild words flung at the 'shirker' and 'slacker' and coward," and that "rural battalions were hard to fill up." So the battalions were made local. Prominent men were given the rank of colonel and told to raise a battalion from their own county, on the theory that a farm boy would sooner go with his neighbors than as a stranger.

On the last day of 1915 Prime Minister Borden announced, without previous warning and, it seems, without any serious consultation with his colleagues, that Canada would put half a million men in uniform, from a population of barely eight million. A week earlier, on December 22, Ottawa had authorized the 110th "Overseas" Battalion, to be raised in Perth County and mobilized at Stratford. January 1916 brought 29,295 recruits across the country, nearly six thousand more than December. One of them was Homer.

The Canadians already had a reputation, and it was a mixed one. The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, wrote that after the Somme the Canadians "were marked out as storm troops," and that "whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line, they prepared for the worst." The Canadian War Museum notes the other side of the coin: a "carefully self-cultivated reputation for restlessness, brawling, and indifference to military etiquette." Daniel knew the reputation. "The Canadians were notorious during World War I for being extremely nasty actually," he said, and everything he had read said that, like the Australians and the New Zealanders, "They lost a lot of young men there. They lost the whole generation of young men."

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On January 17, 1916, at St. Marys, Homer signed the attestation paper of the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force and was given the number 727333. He gave his trade as farmer, his next of kin as his father, Philip St. John, and his date of birth as March 20, 1897. The day and month were right. The year was three years early.

A justice of the peace certified that "the Recruit above-named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act," and Homer swore to be "faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth." The officer who signed him up, the St. Marys museum found, was Lt. W. J.

Wright, the principal of the St. Marys high school, and the battalion's clerks at Stratford typed him onto the roll of recruits for that week between Andrew Bach and Ross Walker Veitch: "727333. Pte. St. John, Homer Doble." He was fifteen years and ten months old. In the family's telling he went into the war at fourteen; the record makes him two months short of sixteen. The army's own rule was eighteen, or younger with a parent's permission, and either age was well under it.

Nobody asked to see a birth certificate. The medical officer's job was to record an "apparent age," and he set Homer's down as eighteen years and ten months, an impressively precise guess about a boy who was fifteen. He measured him at five feet nine and a half, 140 pounds, chest 36 inches fully expanded, complexion fair, hair dark brown, religion Methodist; noted "Teeth defective — for attention of Dental Corps"; and wrote: "his heart and lungs are healthy; he has the free use of his joints and limbs, and he declares that he is not subject to fits of any description. I consider him Fit."

He was in good company. Somewhere between fifteen and twenty thousand underage boys served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, a little over three in every hundred, and Veterans Affairs Canada says plainly that recruiting officers "were not always enforcing the minimum age."

Two months later he was in hospital instead. On March 15 he was admitted to hospital at Stratford with an acute mastoid infection, an infection behind the ear that, before antibiotics, was a leading cause of death in children. He was operated on on the 17th, the infection was drained ("drainage secured," the medical officer wrote), and he came out on April 10 after twenty-six days. Then came the summer camp. Camp Borden, north of Toronto, was opened by the Minister of



THE 110TH BATTALION AT LONDON, JUNE 1916

Militia, Sam Hughes, on July 11, 1916, after two months of building, and was soon "occupied by some 32,000 troops"; a photograph of the 110th Battalion drawn up there is dated August 31. Two weeks later the Ontario Temperance Act shut every bar in the province.



HOMER ST. JOHN (DIGITALLY RESTORED)

In June, before Borden, the whole battalion was drawn up in tiers on a wooden stand at London to be photographed, the band at either end with its drums, the officers in the front rank, row on row of privates in peaked caps behind them. Homer, three months out of hospital, should be somewhere in those rows. Nobody has yet found him there.

A private's pay was a dollar a day, and ten cents more once he was overseas. From November 1, 1916, Homer signed over twenty dollars a month of it to "Mrs Sarah L. St John, St Marys Ont., mother," and for the next thirteen months the cheques went home. On October 24, a week before the battalion sailed, he made his will on the army's printed form. Two of the 110th's senior N.C.O.s witnessed it.

He left everything he had to his mother, at Peel Street, St. Marys: a house the family rented from a J. A. Chesterfield, now 23 Peel Street North, which suggests they had moved off the farm and into town while he was in uniform. When the battalion's roll was printed for the voyage, it still gave his next of kin as "St. John, Philip, Woodham, Ont." He was sixteen.



THE 110TH (PERTH) BATTALION AT CAMP BORDEN, 31 AUGUST 1916

On October 31, 1916, the 110th embarked for England, about six hundred and sixty strong, aboard the Cunard liner *Caronia*. She was a ship of nearly twenty thousand tons, built on the Clyde in 1905, known in better days as the "pretty sister of *Carmania*," and an armed cruiser before she was a troopship. She held one other distinction. On April 14, 1912, she had sent the *Titanic* the first of that night's ice warnings: "bergs, growlers and field ice."

The crossing took eleven days; the Admiralty would not adopt convoys in earnest until the following summer, and troopships in 1916 trusted to speed and to the destroyers that met them in the danger zone. One Canadian officer, crossing the year before, wrote home on the day those destroyers appeared: "many a heart feels lighter tonight." Homer landed in England on November 11. No letter of his survives to say how his heart felt.

The new year found him in Sussex. On New Year's Day, 1917, the 110th ceased to exist as a fighting unit: its men were taken on the strength of the 8th Reserve Battalion at Shoreham, one of three hutted camps on the South Downs that the Canadians had taken over in 1916, where the standard hut was sixty feet by twenty and slept thirty men. The county battalions had been raised with fanfare at home precisely, as the army's Chief of the General Staff had put it, because "the despatch of complete battalions would gratify the senior ranks and appeal to local sentiment."

In England they were broken up for reinforcements. "New battalions from home came and took up quarters in camp," a chaplain at Bramshott, in Hampshire, wrote, "and to their surprise were broken up and sent in drafts to France." It happened in France too. When the 60th, one of the 58th's own brigade, was broken up in 1917, some of its men put up a cross near Vimy: "In memory of the 60th Battalion. 1915–Raised by Patriotism. 1917–Killed by Politics."

The training was meant to take fourteen weeks: musketry, bombs, bayonet, gas drill, digging, wire, the Lewis gun. "No man was permitted to proceed to France," the Overseas Ministry reported, "until he had passed adequate tests." The army had a category for boys like Homer, too, although nobody yet knew he was one: "A 4. Men under 19 years of age, who will be fit for A 1 or A 2 as soon as they attain that age." On May 17, 1917, at Shorncliffe, in Kent, he was transferred to the 58th Battalion, and the next day he landed in France.

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The battalion he joined that May, the 58th, was a Central Ontario battalion, raised around Niagara in 1915 and in France since February 1916, one of four in the 9th Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Division. It had already been through Mount Sorrel, where it lost 165 men in a morning, and the Somme, where on October 1, 1916, its brigade attacked Regina Trench, found the wire "mostly uncut," and lost 941 officers and men in a day. It had been in reserve at Vimy. A month before Homer arrived its diarist wrote: "The men have now done nine days duty in the trenches and are in no condition to carry on." The new men were replacements for men like those.

He went up from the base on May 21 and joined the battalion in the field on May 24, 1917. It was in the support line north-west of Avion, below the captured Vimy Ridge, facing the coalfields around Lens. The diary for that day reads, in full: "Support Line. Wind S.W.—light. Fine. Working parties of 3 Officers and 350 O.Rs. supplied on various tasks. Hostile shelling normal. Casualties—2 O.R. Wounded, 1 O.R. wounded (shell-shock), 1 O.R. Wounded and Remained at Duty."

Hostile shelling normal. It was the kind of day the war was mostly made of: men digging and carrying, and a few of them hit. The ground was the debris of Vimy. One gunner, writing home that month from just behind Thélus, remembered of his battery's first position at the front that "it was a case of eating, drinking and sleeping in mud!"

The army over him was changing too. On June 9 the Canadian Corps got a new commander. Sir Julian Byng, the Englishman who had taken Vimy, went off to an army of his own, and the Corps passed to Arthur Currie, a Victoria real-estate man who had joined the militia as a gunner. The soldiers, by one historian's account, found him "stiff, abrupt, sometimes pompous, and occasionally insulting," and did not realize

how hard he worked "to avoid needless sacrifices on the battlefield."

Between Currie and Private St. John stood the 3rd Division's Major-General Louis Lipsett, a British regular who had once taught Currie his soldiering; Brigadier-General F. W. Hill of the 9th Brigade; and the 58th's own commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Harry Genet, D.S.O., whose signature closes every page of the battalion's diary that summer.

What he carried had changed as well. The Ross rifle, the Canadian-made weapon that jammed when it was fouled and that a third of the survivors of Ypres had thrown away for Lee-Enfields, had been withdrawn from the 3rd Division the summer before; Homer's rifle in France was the Lee-Enfield. The British platoon manual of February 1917 told him what else mattered: "The bomb is the second weapon of every N.C.O. and man," "the rifle bomb is the 'howitzer' of the infantry," and "the Lewis gun is the weapon of opportunity." A rifleman went into an attack with at least 120 rounds and two bombs, and every man carried a gas respirator.

In the middle of June the 58th went into the front line before Avion, three companies forward, with German trench mortars busy every night; on the 15th three of its men were killed and five wounded. A farm boy in its A Company, Private Lawrence Johns, who came from Elimville in Usborne Township, the Huron County township whose boundary road ran through Woodham, kept a diary. "Heavy shelling on the right," he wrote that morning. "Also liv(e)ly exchange of shells over our front. larks singing close overhead also machine gun bullets."

Then the battalion came out to Villers-au-Bois and rehearsed. On June 22 the diary records "Practice attack on taped trenches all day": the trenches to be taken were marked out with tape in a field behind the lines, and the companies walked through the attack until they knew it by heart.

On the night of June 25 the battalion went back in through the rain and the shelling ("Relief very difficult on account of darkness"), losing about fifteen men as it passed the Quarries. "Very wet night," wrote Johns. The next morning the Germans pulled back, and at half past nine the 58th followed them into Adept Trench and spent the 27th digging in under "considerable shelling." In one abandoned trench C Company found a German soldier "who had apparently been left lying wounded and died," and took his identity disc. Orders came that afternoon. "Stay in front line trench all day," Johns wrote. "Going over the top tomorrow morning at 2:30 A.M. expect some thing doing."

The attack on Avion Trench went in at 2:30 a.m. on June 28, 1917. The 58th attacked on a two-company front beside the 52nd, behind a rolling barrage: the guns laid a curtain of shells a little ahead of the infantry and lifted it forward by stages, and the men walked behind it as close as they dared. Every man carried a tool, one pick to every two shovels. The password was "TWENTY-SEVEN."

If they took the trench they were to fire green, green and white Very lights; if they were in trouble, red. A Company reported that when the barrage opened the men "immediately assumed the prone position, but once they commenced moving forward were quite cool in the face of the M.G. fire," which is the sort of sentence only an army can write about men walking towards a machine gun.

Two hundred yards short of the trench a concrete dug-out blew up on their flank "and inflicted several casualties and 'shell-shocks.'" In B Company an officer crept to within fifteen or twenty feet of a German machine gun "and shot the 2 men who were operating it." At 3:05 a.m. a contact aeroplane overhead picked up the flares in the objective.

"Capture Avion," Johns wrote. "Over the top at 2:30 A.M. very heavy barrage going the right Also a lot coming the wrong way. Quite a number of prisoners taken Our section captured a Sargt-Major. Plenty of fun. Fritz shelled us heavy all day. Several casualties. Dirty day." The battalion's verdict was briefer: "The operation was most successful." Eleven prisoners came back, most of them of the 5th Grenadier Guards, "very good type." That evening, in a thunderstorm, the Canadians pushed on into Avion itself.

The war correspondent Philip Gibbs wrote of "a violent thunder-storm whose noise and light-



OVER THE TOP AT 2:30 A.M. (ILLUSTRATION)

ning mingled in an awesome way with the tumult and flame of the great artillery," and heard afterwards that the men "were drenched to the skin as soon as they started to attack." The shelled ground "became as slippery as ice, so that many of them stumbled and fell."

They held Avion Trench for three more days of rain and shelling. Johns explored the German dug-outs and found "plenty of good feather beds to sleep on," and a whizz-bang landed ten feet from him: "Thought for a minute that I had a Blighty no good I was still whole." The battalion's losses for the tour came to sixteen men killed, seven missing and about ninety wounded, among them a captain who died of his wounds.

On June 30 the colonel wrote: "Men very tired. Got small issue of rum for them, which helped a bit to keep them going." The relief came "late owing to darkness and slippery condition of ground," at a quarter past three on the morning of July 1. It was Dominion Day. Johns spent it carrying a wounded man out on a stretcher, "Terrible trip under heavy shell fire but got out safe to dressing station."

Where Homer was in all this, no record says. The diary names officers, never privates; his own sheet records nothing between his arrival in May and September. He was on the battalion's strength throughout, and the battalion was at Avion Trench.

In July the 3rd Division held the right of the Canadian line, the flooded ground between Avion and Méricourt. Currie judged it tactically unsound to try to hold the railway embankment there, which the Germans overlooked, and his final orders to the 3rd Division were "to raid and withdraw." On the night of July 22 the 58th's neighbor, the 116th, raided the German line at Méricourt and was gassed as it formed up.

"Suddenly the bells in the German trenches, not a hundred yards from the right flank, began to ring," one of its officers wrote; "gas fumes were rapidly making their way over our positions." The 58th's diary for the night says only that the enemy "heavily barraged our front line." Then the division came out to rest at Gouy-Servins, where the August diary records rain, musketry, and "Gas instruction and drill."

Gas was by now the war's chemistry lesson. Chlorine, the green cloud of 1915, had given way to phosgene fired in shells, nearly invisible and far more lethal, and on July 12, 1917, at Ypres, the Germans had introduced mustard, "Yellow Cross," an oily liquid that did nothing for hours and then blistered skin, eyes and lungs, and soaked into



AFTER A TRENCH RAID, AVION, JULY 1917

clothing so that a gassed man could gas the men around him in a dug-out. The Canadians gave as good as they got. Before the attack on Hill 70 the Royal Engineers fired more than 3,500 drums of gas into Lens, so that, in one Canadian officer's words, "the city reeked with gas and was pregnant with death."

Hill 70 was Currie's first battle in command, and his own idea. Ordered to take Lens, a ruined coal town lying in a hollow, he argued instead for the bare chalk hill that overlooked it, on the theory that the Germans would find it intolerable to lose and would wear themselves out trying to take it back under his guns. On August 15 the 1st and 2nd Divisions took it. Currie counted "no fewer than twenty-one counter-attacks" and called it "altogether the hardest battle in which the Corps has participated." The 3rd Division was in reserve that day. The 58th spent it marching fifteen miles from Gouy to Raimbert, with "no marching casualties."

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On August 22 the 9th Brigade went into Lens. The 58th relieved the 31st Battalion in brigade reserve at Cité St. Pierre at two in the morning, and for five days found working and carrying parties, two hundred men at a time, for the engineers and the machine-gunners. The mining suburbs on that side of Lens were "brick-built company towns of miners' houses," in the official history's words, "most of which months of shellfire had reduced to a fantastic maze of ruins across which trenches now meandered."

Gibbs found Lens "no better than its outer suburbs, a town of battered houses without roofs and with broken walls leaning against rubbish-heaps of brickwork and timber," and said of it: "There is never a night's rest in Lens nor round about it unless men are put to sleep for ever."

The men lived in cellars. Johns wrote to his mother from one on the 25th: "I had a good wash and shave this morning it was quite a job as several big 5.9 shells were floating around near by One had to look after two jobs at once. but never the less I made a fair job. We are living in a nice deep cellar with one small entrance which serves as a door and window." Then: "One more of our boys was killed night before last from concussion."

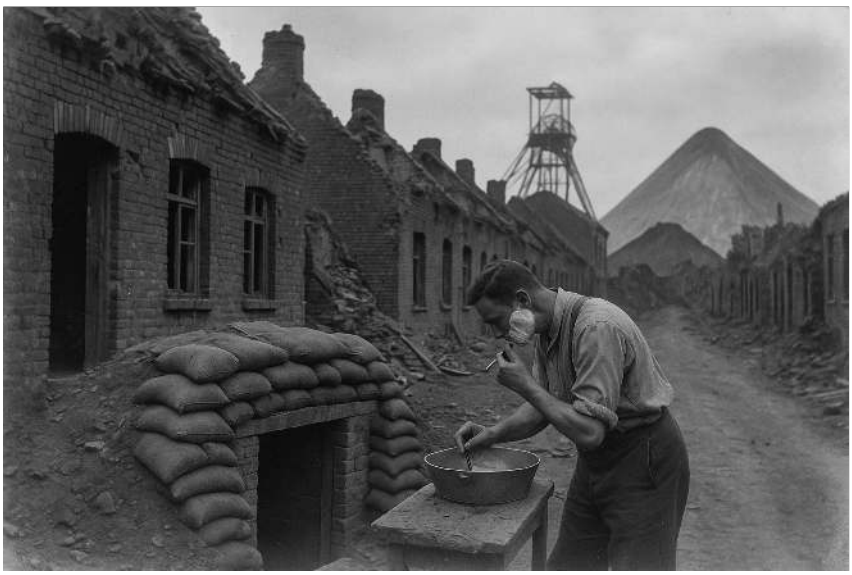
"No doubt the casualty list will be large at present time," Johns added, "as the fighting has been rather stiff." On the 27th, in the rain, the 58th went up into the front line between Cité St. Émile and Cité St. Laurent, two companies forward, facing a German trench called Cinnabar. Early the next morning the wall of a ruined house fell on C Company's ration party and hurt eight men; the diary allowed that it was "Not clear whether wall was knocked over by a 'dud' or fell in."

Gas shells were part of every day on this front. On August 29 the battalion recorded one man "wounded (gassed)." On the 30th, at half past one in the afternoon, C Company went after a German-held communication trench called Nun's Alley. There was no artillery support; it was done by daylight with bombs. A party of eight bombers under Lieutenant F. E. Gray went first, with rifle grenadiers behind them firing their "howitzer" bombs over the traverses, and a mopping-up party bombing the dug-outs.

"No. 1 Section attacked the enemy block at 1.30 p.m., covered by the fire of the Grenadiers. This was taken and the garrison of 8 were killed and enemy machine gun captured." The machine gun turned out to be a British Lewis gun, which they turned round and used, so that it changed sides twice in the war and ended up, for one afternoon at least, back where it started. Gray was wounded and another officer took them on to within fifty yards of Cinnabar Trench. Thirty German dead were counted in the captured trench, all of the 365th Regiment. "All ranks behaved well," the diary says, "and everyone concerned has reason to be proud of the operation."

The Germans answered with everything they had. From two that afternoon until a quarter to five the next morning they bombarded the division's whole front, with heavy counter-attacks at 8:15 in the evening and 4:20 in the morning. August 31 was the worst day of the battalion's summer: a captain and nine men killed, two more dead of wounds, thirty-nine wounded, and two "wounded (gassed)." On September 1 the shelling came again, from eight until midnight.

Canon Frederick Scott, a Canadian chaplain, saw gassed men brought into an advanced dressing station in the Hill 70 fighting, and set down what gas did to them: "So strongly were their clothes saturated with the poison that, as they were being cut off, ... our eyes and throats smarted from the fumes. There was nothing more horrible than to see men dying from gas." On the night of September 2 the 52nd came up to relieve them, and on the 3rd the 58th marched back to billets at Bouvigny-Boyeffles, arriving at eleven at night.



A NICE DEEP CELLAR (ILLUSTRATION)

The diary for September 4, 1917, reads: "Battalion rested. Men rather played out with hard trip in the line. Men paid and bathed." That same day Homer was sentenced for drunkenness and for being absent from the three o'clock parade. The entry on his sheet, reported from the field by the battalion's commanding officer, reads: "Sentenced to 14 days F.P. No. 1, 4.9.17, for when on active service (1) drunkenness (2) absent from 3 P.M. parade 4.9.17." It was published in the battalion's orders on September 15.

Field Punishment No. 1 was a sentence a commanding officer could award on active service, without a court martial, for up to twenty-eight days. Under the rules then in force, a man could be kept in fetters or handcuffs, put to hard labor, and "attached for a period or periods not exceeding two hours in any one day to a fixed object," such as a post or a wheel, but not on more than three days in any four. The soldiers called it "crucifixion."

When a battalion was on the move a man under sentence was not tied up at all; he marched with his unit, carried his arms, did "all their military duties as well as extra fatigue duties," and was treated as a defaulter. Soldiers who had committed offences, the Canadian War Museum notes, got no rum, and drunkenness was the most common disciplinary offence of all.

The 58th was on the move. On September 5 it marched toward Mont-St-Éloi, on the 6th to Neuville-St-Vaast, and on the night of the 7th it went back into the line in the Acheville sector, where two more of its men were gassed on the 9th and 10th, and where, on the night of the 12th, the Royal Engineers released gas from projectors on the battalion's right.

Lawrence Johns, who had written that "Poisionous gas is a common thing these days," was killed near Lens that day; a comrade wrote to his family that "he was killed instantly." On September 15 the 58th handed the line to the 116th, whose officers recorded that the 58th "had had an ideal tour with scarcely any shelling," and went back by light railway to Le Pendu Camp in the Bois des Alleux. There it bathed, was paid, and on September 21 won the 3rd Divisional football championship, beating the 123rd Battalion six to nothing.

On September 26, 1917, someone claimed Homer's true age. A red-ink note in the margin of his attestation records it: "Actual age claimed on 26/9/17. Birth cert shows date of birth 20/3/1900." The note does not say who made the claim. It may have been Homer himself, or it may have been his parents at home; families did write to Ottawa for their sons, and no letter survives in his file either way. The army acted at once. On September 27 he was struck off the battalion's strength: "Minor." The 58th, at Le Pendu Camp, recorded only "Battalion training." He was seventeen and a half. He had been in France four months and nine days.

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The way home took two and a half months. On September 28 he was "Transferred to England for discharge as a Minor" and sent to the depot of his Ontario regiment at Shorncliffe, then to East Sandling camp nearby, and on October 23 to No. 1 Canadian Discharge Depot at Buxton, in Derbyshire. Buxton was a Victorian spa a thousand feet up in the Peak District, built "in the style of Bath" around a warm spring, and now full of Canadian hospitals and of men the army was sending home: the sick, the unfit, the worn out and the young.

On November 6, 1917, he embarked at Liverpool on the *Olympic*, the *Titanic*'s sister, painted that year in dazzle camouflage and known to the troops as "Old Reliable." A sergeant who made the same crossing that summer remembered that "never for a moment during the time we were in the submarine zone did the ship cease its zigzagging course."

His pay card notes "Olympic 14/11/17," most likely the day she came in. By the end of November he was at No. 1 Casualty Unit in London, Ontario, and on December 8 a medical board examined him for discharge. It found him "Well developed. Heart, lungs and other organs normal. Requires dental treatment." No disability. It recommended category "A IV," the army's class for men fit in every respect except age, and dental work.

Homer signed the form for a man who refused treatment: he understood "the nature of the treatment which it is recommended that I should

undergo and refuse to accept it." The only treatment the board had recommended was dental. He also signed the certificate for a soldier who takes his discharge at his own request: "I hereby declare that I do of my own free will request to be discharged from His Majesty's Service." On December 10, 1917, he was discharged at London "in consequence of Underage." Conduct and character: "Good." Special qualifications for civil life: "Farmer." He had served one year and 328 days.

He came home to a country in the middle of a quarrel. Two days before his medical board, on December 6, a munitions ship had blown up in Halifax harbor and killed some two thousand people; one week after his discharge, on December 17, Canada held the bitterest election in its history, over conscription. The Military Service Act made single men of twenty to thirty-four liable to be called up. It did not touch a seventeen-year-old who had already been to France, and it specifically exempted men who had served in a theatre of war and been honorably discharged. Homer was, so far as the law of 1917 was concerned, done.

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Home, that December, was London. His family had moved while he was away: his mother's address on the army's pay sheets changed in 1917 from St. Marys to 460 Dorinda Street, in the east end of London, an industrial district of foundries, car works and stove factories a short walk from the fairgrounds. London was a city of about sixty thousand and a military town, headquarters of the district that had just discharged him.

Prices had nearly doubled since before the war: across Canada, food that cost $7.34 a week for a family in 1913 cost $13.63 by December 1918; the city's Board of Health issued fifty-five permits for families to keep hogs inside the city limits, "as a temporary war measure"; and in the autumn of 1918 the influenza came. London buried 231 of its people. The district health officer for southwestern Ontario, a Dr. T. J. McNally, very likely the same man who had sat on Homer's medical board, reported that the epidemic took its victims "not alone from the weak and aged but for the most part from the strongest and best of our people."

In the spring of 1919 the government paid him a war service gratuity of $350, less what it had already paid him, which came to $249.90 in four cheques, addressed to 379 Eva Street, London. The same spring Ottawa admitted something about boys like him. An order-in-council of April 1919 opened retraining to young men who had "enlisted voluntarily in the forces under the military age of eighteen years," on the grounds that "the years they spent in the Army were just those during which they should have been fitting themselves to earn a livelihood."

Seven and a half thousand former boy soldiers were in its classes by the end of the year. Whether Homer was one of them, no record found says. In the family's version his father was "a contractor that paved a lot of the streets in London, Ontario." No record found says that either; the one St. John in the 1922 London directory is "St John, Phillip, wks G T R," a railwayman, at 768 Dundas Street.

The family remembered his war differently. In their telling he spent four years in the trenches and was gassed: "He was chlorine gassed." He came back at eighteen, "in bad shape," after "some of the worst activity, you know, in the trenches." Daniel measured it against a boy's schooling: the years his grandfather was at the war were the years a boy spends as a freshman through a senior in high school. The record is kinder on some counts and silent on others.

It has him enlisting at fifteen, in France for four months, and home at seventeen. Chlorine was the gas of 1915, the year before he enlisted. But his battalion was gassed, a man or two at a time, on four nights of that summer, and the Canadian War Museum notes that "many soldiers never reported their multiple minor gassings." The board that discharged him found no disability, and, the museum adds, there were few treatment programs after the war for veterans who suffered from the mental trauma of war.

As for the trenches, the Canadians told Philip Gibbs that August that "their troops have never had harder or more prolonged fighting, not even in their old days of the Ypres salient nor on the Somme."

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On Monday, October 4, 1920, two days after her twentieth birthday, Homer married Alice Rose Pigeon at St. Joseph's Rectory in Stratford. She was a Stratford girl, born on October 2, 1900, six months after him, one of a houseful of children of Paschal Pigeon and Catherine Foley, a Catholic family who lived on Front Street. Homer had sworn out the licence in London three days before. He gave his trade as "Labourer," his age as twenty, his birthplace as Woodham, and his religion, which the army had put down as Methodist, as Presbyterian.

Alice's was Roman Catholic, and a Catholic priest, Thomas McCarthy, married them, with two Pigeons of Hibernia Street as witnesses. Her middle name came out differently in every record: Rose to the family, "Rosmary" on the licence, "Rosaline" in the *St. Marys Journal*, which gave the wedding a line that week: "ST. JOHN—PIGEON—In Stratford on Monday, Oct. 4, 1920, Alice Rosaline Pigeon of Stratford to Homer Doble St. John of London, Ont."

Daniel described her side of the family this way: "her mother was Irish. She was from Limerick. She was Kitty Foley. But her father was a pigeon, was a French-Canadian." The records sort it out. Pigeon was the surname, and Kitty Foley was Catherine, Alice's mother. Their son John was born in Stratford on June 2, 1921, the day after census day. Stratford that year was a railway and furniture town of sixteen thousand, built around the Grand Trunk's great locomotive shops, and in March, across Canada, the slump after the war had put one trade-union man in six out of work.

That November the army sent him something by registered post, most likely his war medals. The address on his card had been crossed out and rewritten: no longer Dorinda Street but "Box 621, Sandwich St, Amherstburg, Ont.," a small town at the mouth of the Detroit River, sixteen miles below Detroit. It was a good place from which to watch America go dry. National Prohibition had begun in January 1920, Michigan had been dry since 1918, and Ontario, which forbade selling liquor but not making it for export, sat across a river less than a mile wide in places. One Michigan broadcaster, looking back, put the traffic at 900,000 cases in the first six months alone; in winter, when the river froze, the cars drove across the ice.

Then they crossed. "They just came over in the 20s because there were work in the factories," Daniel said. "You could go through Detroit, across from Canada into Detroit." A great many did. In 1925 a Toronto newspaperman counted a hundred thousand Canadians in Detroit, one in ten of the city, which made Detroit "the largest Canadian city in the United States." In Detroit, he reported, "they call Canadians 'freshwater immigrants.'" An immigration inspector told him, "A Canadian is the only immigrant you cannot tell from a native-born American at a glance." Canadians were left outside the quotas of the Immigration Act of 1924, but they now needed a visa, and with the new Border Patrol the government had begun to spend more of its energy on deportation.

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By the middle of the 1930s the St. Johns were in Flint, the town where General Motors began. Homer, Daniel said, "had worked in the Buick plant in the 30s." It was a hard decade there. American car production fell from five million in 1929 to 1.3 million in 1932, and Flint shrank, from 156,492 people in 1930 to 151,543 in 1940. Over the winter of 1936–37 the auto workers sat down inside the General Motors plants for forty-four days and won their union. By then there were more children. A daughter, Jane, had been born in Michigan in about 1933, and another child, Robert John, called Bobby, was born in Flint on May 17, 1935.

John and Pat, the eldest, were growing up. Pat, about two years younger than John, would hear music once and play it on the piano right away.

Robert John St. John died on March 13, 1939, at Hurley Hospital, Flint's public hospital, of broncho-pneumonia following measles. A doctor had attended him for six days. He was three years, nine months and twenty-five days old, and John was seventeen. The family was living at 2012 Swayze Street. The man who gave the clerk the particulars was his father, Homer St. John, and

he was buried two days later in New Calvary, the Catholic cemetery.

"Any kind of sickness could kill you then because they didn't have the medication," Daniel said, "and I wasn't sure just what it was with Bobby." Measles was still a killer of small children, pneumonia was its usual way of doing it, there would be no vaccine for another twenty-four years, and penicillin would not reach ordinary civilians until the next war.

John left home soon after and rode the boxcars west in the Depression, as boys did, and went on to a life of his own, which belongs to another chapter. In 1940 the United States required every alien over fourteen to register and be fingerprinted at the post office, and more than five million did. By the family's account Homer was still not a citizen then, which would have put him in the queue; whether he stood in it, no paper yet found says.

In November 1943 Daniel was born in Flint, "strangely," as he put it, while John was overseas; his mother, as he told it, "went and stayed with them when I was born." By the time the war ended Homer and Alice had moved to San Jose, California, where several of Alice's brothers and sisters also settled, and where, Daniel said, "they had an extra house there." They offered it to John's wife, and to John when the army let him go.

San Jose was then a town of seventy thousand in the middle of the Valley of Heart's Delight, two-thirds of whose land was in fruit trees; it canned and dried and shipped apricots, peaches and prunes, and nobody had yet thought of putting computers in it. John got out on Daniel's second birthday, "let's say November 1945," and that was the first time Daniel saw him.

In France John had lived in the home of "one of these underground people," and the communists, as Daniel put it, "made a communist out of him," so that back in America he joined the American Communist Party. In San Jose "he had all these propaganda leaflets down in the basement and he was having meetings at the house," with union leaders from the Bay Area and with black people. "And it freaked my grandfather out because they still were not American citizens even. You know, they were Canadians. And the FBI was coming around."

Canada did not create a citizenship of its own until New Year's Day, 1947; until then Canadians were British subjects. In California, either way, they were aliens, and the Alien Registration Act of 1940 allowed the government to deport any alien who had "at any time" since arriving been a member of an organization that advocated overthrowing the government. Some of its language had been written specifically to help deport one union leader, the Australian-born Harry Bridges.

The family did not stay. "We had to uproot and move out of California," Daniel said, and they went back across the country to Massachusetts when he was three or four years old.

Homer and Alice stayed on in San Jose through the 1950s. When the census taker came round in April 1950 he found Homer, fifty, and Alice, forty-nine, with three of their children at home: Patricia, twenty-seven, born in Canada, and Jane, seventeen, and Phillip, eight, both born in Michigan. He also wrote Homer down as a naturalized citizen. The family remembered him as no citizen in 1946, so either Homer took out his papers in those few years or the census is wrong; his naturalization papers have not been found. The same census taker, or the clerk who indexed his page seventy years later, turned him into "Homer Si John," which is partly why he took so long to find.

The town grew up around them. It had ninety-five thousand people in 1950 and more than two hundred thousand by 1960, as a city manager named Dutch Hamann annexed the orchards one after another and the subdivisions went in. In the autumn of 1962 Daniel was at Berkeley, working three jobs, and, as he said, "I just burned myself out." He had to get back to Massachusetts "somehow." "I think my grandparents who were living in San Jose bought me a ticket," he said. His father put him on the train in November, and he went home to Massachusetts and eight months at the paper mill, double shifts included.

Homer St. John died on September 10, 1972, at Placerville, the old Gold Rush county seat in the Sierra foothills, at seventy-two, "following an

illness in a local hospital," as the *Mountain Democrat* put it four days later. Daniel's only words on Homer's end began, "Well, Homer was like this. He was having trouble," and the story went on to his father instead; the newspaper filled in the rest. He had lived twenty-seven years in California and the last three in El Dorado County, and he was, in its words, "owner of an apartment house in San Jose."

The funeral was held at the Chapel of the Pines on September 13, Father Thomas O'Brien of St. Patrick's Catholic church conducting, and he was buried in St. Patrick's Cemetery. The notice listed the family he left: his wife Alice; John St. John of Costa Mesa, Patricia Vilenski of Chula Vista, Jane Holes of Placerville and Philip St. John of San Jose; two sisters in Canada, Frieda Vanderland and Phyllis Marriott; twelve grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Alice outlived him by eleven years. For twenty-five years she was executive secretary for the Boy Scouts of America. She moved south to Chula Vista, where her son John also lived, and died in San Diego on October 23, 1983. Four days later, after a graveside service, she was buried in St. Patrick's Cemetery. Both Placerville papers remembered her as a native of Canada and gave her age as eighty; she was eighty-three.

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Homer St. John comes down to his family in two halves. The army kept one: the farm boy from Blanshard who put his age up three years to go to war at fifteen, four months with the 58th in the line at Avion and Lens, his true age in red ink in the margin, and the one word that sent him home at seventeen: "Minor." The family kept the other: the crossing to Detroit, the Buick plant and Bobby's grave in Flint, the house in San Jose, and the ticket home in 1962 that, as Daniel thought, his grandparents bought.

No letter of his has survived to say what he made of any of it. The forty-eight pages are still in Ottawa. He lies in the foothills of the Sierra, in the same cemetery as Alice, under a stone that says only "Dad," a long way from Woodham.

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Wikipedia (64): 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade; Battle of Hill 70; Small box respirator; Field punishment; Royal Canadian Legion; Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment; Spanish flu; 1919 Ontario prohibition referendum; Rum-running; Alien Registration Act; 110th Battalion (Perth); Perth Regiment; Template:1917 Canadian federal election/Perth...; Perth South (federal electoral district); Wikipedia articles on the 110th Battalion, the...; Shorncliffe Army Camp; Halifax Explosion; Wartime Elections Act; Conscription Crisis of 1917; Military Service Act, 1917; Unionist Party (Canada); 1919 Ontario general election; United Farmers of Ontario; CFB London; Soldier Settlement Board; Winnipeg general strike; Depression of 1920–1921; Khaki University; Canadian Expeditionary Force; Ross rifle; Étaples mutiny; List of infantry battalions in the Canadian...; Shoreham-by-Sea; Folkestone; Eaton's; Perth County, Ontario; South Huron; Methodist Church (Canada); Education in Ontario; St. Marys, Ontario; 1911 Canadian federal election; 1902 Ontario prohibition referendum; Prohibition in Canada; Wilfrid Laurier; 1911 Canadian census; Immigration to Canada; Ontario Hydro; Imperial Oil; Western Fair; 1901 Canadian census; Old East Village; Huron Tract; Perth South; Ambassador Bridge; Detroit–Windsor Tunnel; Immigration Act of 1924; San Jose, California; History of San Jose, California; 1946 Oakland general strike; Great War Veterans' Association of Canada; Great War Veterans Association; Immigration Act of 1917; Mustard gas; Union Government (Canada).

Other pages (29): Tim Cook, 'More a Medicine than a Beverage':...; LAC digitized war diaries; Chronicling America search, "homer st. john",...; San José Public Library (city directories); CDC/NCHS, historical mortality tables; Walter P. Reuther Library, Ashley Johnson...; The Henry Ford, Ford's Five-Dollar Day; FDA, Sulfanilamide Disaster; Underage and Overeager, Military & Family...; University of Guelph Archives, Blanshard and...; CASO Station, Stratford as a Railway Centre; Toronto Railway Historical Association, Stratford; Wikipedia (technical specifications); Collingwood soldiers helped make Camp Borden a...; Waterloo Region museum, Temperance and...; Historical detective work set for display; US Customs and Border Protection, Along U.S....; Eastern Michigan University, on Bavery's...; Tim Cook, 'He was determined to go': Underage...; Formac Lorimer, Black and Boileau, Old Enough...; CDC, "Chlorine" chemical fact sheet; Immigration Act of 1924, text; Fong Haw Tan v. Phelan, 333 U.S. 6 (1948); CDC Pink Book, ch. 7, Diphtheria; National WWII Museum, Thanks to Penicillin; MTC/ABAG, San Jose city place profile; Truman Library, Truman's Loyalty Program; Harry S. Truman, Veto of the Internal Security...; US Senate, vetoes of President Truman.

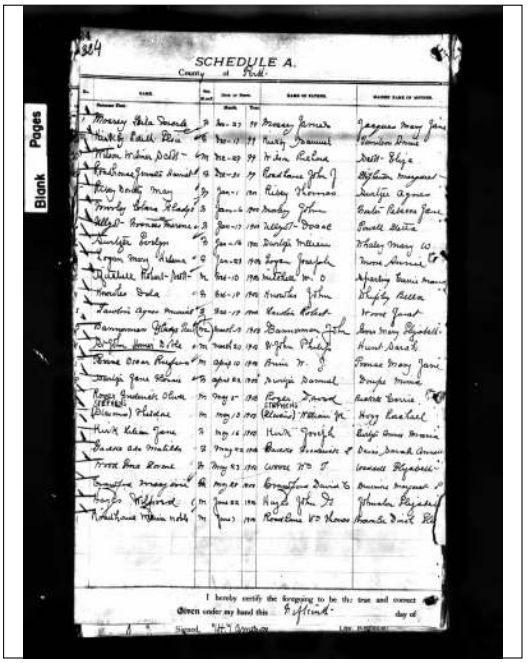
Picture searches for the plates (27): Wikimedia Commons API; Library of Congress loc.gov JSON API, photos...; Canadian Great War Project query service,...; Wartime Canada, 110th Battalion "D.A.C. men"...; Camp Borden trench training, 1916; Major-General Sam Hughes at the saluting base,...; Hill 70 - Canadians in captured trenches,...; A line of Canadian troops receiving drinks,...; Group of Canadians at a soup kitchen, Hill...; Wounded Canadian soldier drinking hot coffee,...; Hill 70 - German shelling, Lens, June 1917; Blocked traffic, Canadian advance on Lens,...; Canadian trench mortar battery after the Battle...; Hill 70 - Canadian gun emplacement; A. Y. Jackson, Cité Jeanne d'Arc; Hill 70 in...; Commons category Battle of Hill 70; Commons category 110th Battalion; Russell Lee, Street and park. San Jose,...; Russell Lee, Shady street and park. San Jose,...; Russell Lee, Typical house. Santa Clara,...; Russell Lee, Santa Clara house, companion...; Russell Lee, "San Jose, California. Sign", 1942; Russell Lee, Santa Clara Holy Ghost fiesta...; HABS, 1147 Chapman Street (House), San Jose; HABS, "Blanchard House", San Jose; San Jose, California, South First Street, 1940s; FSA/OWI rights statement.

Search tools (4): Wikipedia MediaWiki API (plain-text extracts); Project Gutenberg catalogue (pg_catalog.csv); Gutendex search API; OpenStreetMap Nominatim: Dorinda Street,....

Tried and blocked or refused (not bypassed) (18): Collection Search record 245971: St. John,...; LAC Collection Search, genealogy query homer...; sortedbyname.com, California Death Index mirror; The Canadian Encyclopedia, Halifax Explosion; Canadiana.ca (robots.txt disallows AI agents;...; Histoire sociale / Social History journal site; William Johnston, The Pioneers of Blanshard,...; Michigan LARA, Liquor Control Commission 90th...; Stratford-Perth Museum website; St. Marys Museum website; Calisphere search; History San José online collections; San José Public Library search; Canadian War Museum collections search; Ontario community newspapers; Bentley Historical Library, Detroit Jewish News...; TheShipsList (troopship sailings); DuckDuckGo web search.

ADDENDUM: THE ST. MARYS RECORDS

Sent by the St. Marys Museum & Archives, St. Marys, Ontario, in October 2026, in reply to a request for anything on Homer St. John and his family. Each document is shown with a full transcription; handwriting is transcribed as written, with [sic] where it is misspelled and [?] where a reading is uncertain.

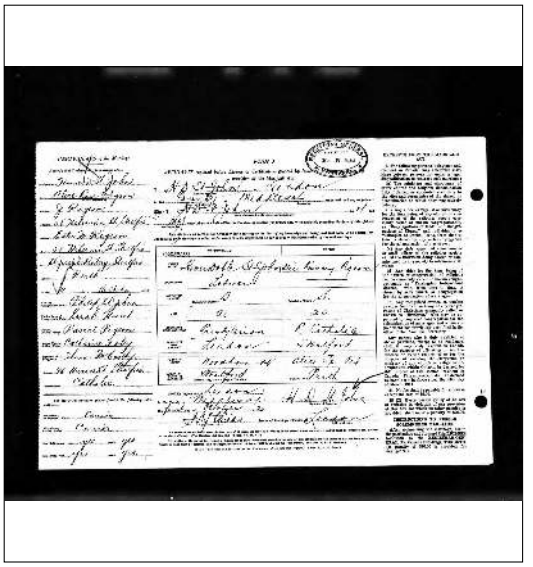


1. *Births, County of Perth, Schedule A, 1899–1900 (p. 324)*

Transcription. Schedule A. County of Perth. Columns: No. · Name (surname first) · Sex · Date of birth · Name of father · Maiden name of mother. Homer's line, the fourteenth on the page, underlined:

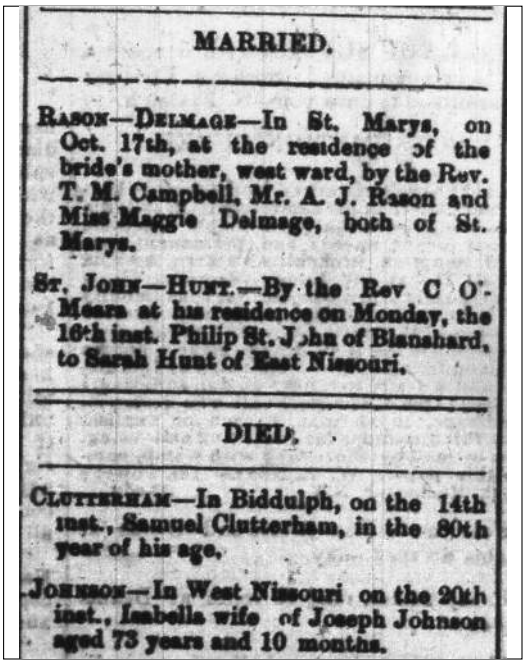
St John Homer Doble · m · March 20 · 1900 · St John Philip · Hunt Sarah

Certificate at the foot: "I hereby certify the foregoing to be the true and correct … Given under my hand this *fifteenth* [?] day of …" signed by the division registrar (signature not legible). The page records 24 births of the district from November 1899 to June 1900.



2. *Marriage licence and registration, Ontario, October 1920*

Affidavit (Form 3, No. 022528; stamped Registrar General, received Oct 5 1920): "I, *H D St John*, of *London*, in the *County of Middlesex* ... That I ... ha[ve] had *my* usual place of abode within the Province of Ontario for fifteen days."
Bridegroom: *Homer Doble St John* · Labourer · Bachelor · 20 · Presbyterian · residence London · born Woodham Ont.
Bride: *Alice Rosmary* [sic] *Pigeon* · Spinster · 20 · R. Catholic · residence Stratford · born *Alice Tp.* [?] *Ont* [probably Ellice Township]. Intended place: Stratford, County of Perth.
Sworn at London, Middlesex, the *first* day of October 1920, before *H J Childs*, Issuer of Marriage Licenses; signed *H D St John*.
Particulars, by the clergyman: "I certify that I solemnized the marriage of *Homer D. St. John* [and] *Alice Rose Pigeon* in the presence of *J. Pigeon*, *58 Hibernia St. Stratford*, [and] *Ester M. Pigeon*, *58 Hibernia St. Stratford*, at *St. Joseph's Rectory, Stratford*, County of *Perth*, on the *4* day of *October* 1920." Bridegroom's father *Philip St. John*; mother *Sarah Hunt*. Bride's father *Pascal Pigeon*; mother *Catharine Foley*. Clergyman *Thomas McCarthy*, *96 Huron St. Stratford*, *Catholic*. Fathers born in Canada; both can read and write.



MARRIED.

RASON—DELMAGE—In St. Marys, on Oct. 17th, at the residence of the bride's mother, west ward, by the Rev. T. M. Campbell, Mr. A. J. Rason and Miss Maggie Delmage, both of St. Marys.

ST. JOHN—HUNT.—By the Rev C O'Meara at his residence on Monday, the 16th inst. Philip St. John of Blanshard, to Sarah Hunt of East Nissouri.

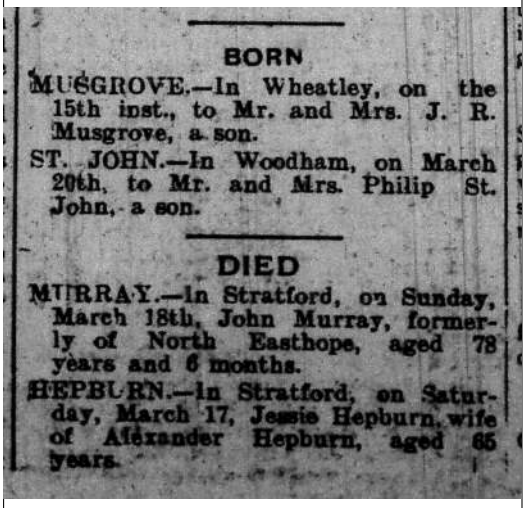
DIED.

CLUTTERHAM—In Biddulph, on the 14th inst., Samuel Clutterham, in the 80th year of his age.

JOHNSON—In West Nissouri on the 20th inst., Isabella wife of Joseph Johnson aged 73 years and 10 months.

Married. ... "ST. JOHN—HUNT.—By the Rev C. O'Meara at his residence on Monday, the 16th inst. Philip St. John of Blanshard, to Sarah Hunt of East Nissouri." Homer's parents. The same column records the marriage of A. J. Rason and Maggie Delmage, and below, under *Died*, Samuel Clutterham of Biddulph and Isabella Johnson of West Nissouri.

3. *St. Marys Argus, 24 October 1889*



BORN

MUSGROVE.—In Wheatley, on the 15th inst., to Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Musgrove, a son.

ST. JOHN.—In Woodham, on March 20th, to Mr. and Mrs. Philip St. John, a son.

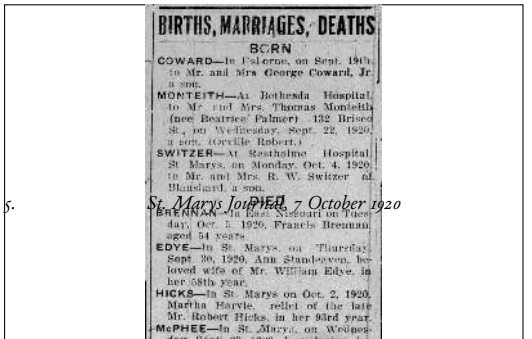
DIED

MURRAY.—In Stratford, on Sunday, March 18th, John Murray, formerly of North Easthope, aged 78 years and 6 months.

HEPBURN.—In Stratford, on Saturday, March 17, Jessie Hepburn, wife of Alexander Hepburn, aged 65 years.

Born. ... "ST. JOHN.—In Woodham, on March 20th, to Mr. and Mrs. Philip St. John, a son." Homer's birth, between a son born to Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Musgrove of Wheatley and, under *Died*, John Murray and Jessie Hepburn of Stratford.

4. *St. Marys Journal, 22 March 1900*



BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DEATHS

BORN

COWARD—In Palermo, on Sept. 19th, to Mr. and Mrs George Coward, Jr. a son.

MONTEITH—At Bethesda Hospital, to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Monteith (nee Beatrice Palmer) 132 Brisco St., on Wednesday, Sept. 22, 1920, a son. (Orville Robert.)

SWITZER—At Southdale Hospital, St. Marys, on Monday, Oct. 4, 1920, to Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Switzer of Blanshard, a son.

DIED

BRENNAN—In East Nissouri on Tuesday, Oct. 5, 1920, Francis Brennan, aged 54 years.

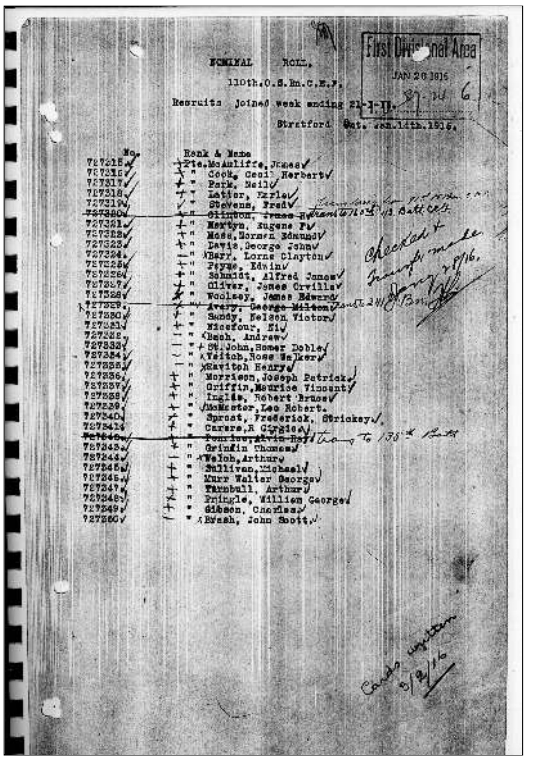
EDYE—In St. Marys, on Thursday, Sept. 30, 1920, Ann Standeven, beloved wife of Mr. William Edye, in her 68th year.

HICKS—In St. Marys on Oct. 2, 1920, Martha Harvie, relict of the late Mr. Robert Hicks, in her 93rd year.

McPHEE—In St. Marys, on Wednesday, Sept. 29, 1920, Peter McPhee, aged 80 years.

Married. ... "ST. JOHN—PIGEON—In Stratford on Monday, Oct. 4, 1920, Alice Rosaline Pigeon of Stratford to Homer Doble St. John of London, Ont." Homer and Alice. In the same column, an In Memoriam for Corp. Wm. Ivan Doupe, "killed in action two years ago the 2nd of October, 1918."

5. *St. Marys Journal, 7 October 1920*



NOMINAL ROLL.

110th.O.S.Bn.C.E.F.

Recruits joined week ending 21-1-16.

Stratford Ont. Jan.14th.1916.

First Divisional Area
JAN 26 1916

No.	Rank & Name
727315	Pte. McAuliffe, Jonesy
727316	" Cook, Cecil Herbert
727317	" Park, Neil
727318	" Latter, Ezrie
727319	" Stevens, Fredy
727320	" Clinton, Frank Robert
727321	" Martyn, Eugene Fw
727322	" Moss, Norman Edmund
727323	" Davis, George John
727324	" Merry, Lorne Clayton
727325	" Fryer, Edwin
727326	" Schmidt, Alfred James
727327	" Oliver, James Orville
727328	" Woolsey, James Edward
727329	" Avery, George Milton
727330	" Sandy, Nelson Victor
727331	" Macefour, Eli
727332	" Bach, Andrew
727333	" Pte. John, Homer Doble
727334	" Veitch, Ross Walker
727335	" Hewitch Henry
727336	" Morrison, Joseph Patrick
727337	" Griffin, Maurice Vincent
727338	" Inglis, Robert Bruce
727339	" McMaster, Leo Robert.
727340	" Sprost, Frederick, Stickey
727341	" Carre, R Cyprien
727342	" Pomfrey, Alvin Roy
727343	" Griffin Thomas
727344	" Welsh, Arthur
727345	" Sullivan, Michael
727346	" Murr Walter George
727347	" Trumbull, Arthur
727348	" Pringle, William George
727349	" Gibson, Charles
727350	" Hyssh, John Scott

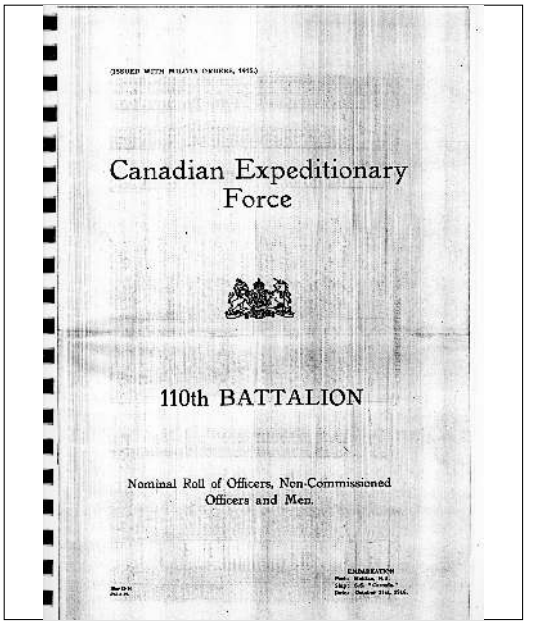
Checked & Transfer made Jany 28/16

Jany 27/16.

Cards written 3/2/16.

6. Nominal roll, 110th Battalion, recruits joined week ending 21 January 1916

Typed: "Nominal Roll. 110th O.S. Bn. C.E.F. Recruits joined week ending 21-1-16. Stratford Ont. Jan. 14th 1916." Stamp: "First Divisional Area, Jan 26 1916." Thirty-six recruits, Nos. 727315 to 727350, each ticked. Homer's line: *727333 · Pte. · St. John, Homer Doble* between 727332 Bach, Andrew and 727334 Veitch, Ross Walker.
Handwritten: against 727319, "transferred from 91st Bn. C.E.F."; four names struck through and transferred, to the 160th, 241st and 135th Battalions; across the page, "Checked & Transfer made Jany 28/16"; at the foot, "Cards written 3/2/16."
St. Marys Museum & Archives A2011.8 (Rick Holt Military Research Fonds).



(ISSUED WITH MILITIA ORDERS, 1915.)

Canadian Expeditionary Force

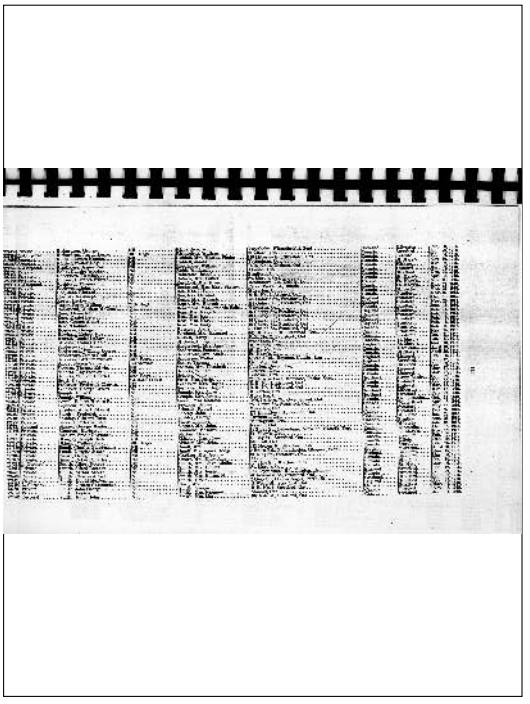
110th BATTALION

Nominal Roll of Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men.

EMBARKATION

7. Embarkation roll of the 110th Battalion: cover

Printed: "(Issued with Militia Orders, 1915.) Canadian Expeditionary Force. 110th Battalion. Nominal Roll of Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men."
"Embarkation. Port: Halifax, N.S. Ship: S.S. 'Caronia.' Date: October 31st, 1916."



8. *Embarkation roll, page 11*

Printed, by column: Regimental number · Rank · Name · Former corps · Next of kin · Address of next of kin · Country of birth · Place taken on strength · Date. Homer's line: *727333 · Private · St. John, Homer Doble · Nil · St. John, Philip · Woodham, Ont. · Canada · St. Mary's · Jan. 17, 1916.*
Nearby on the page are Perth County men from Stratford, Milverton, Listowel, Atwood and Kirkton, among them James Earl Roadhouse of Kirkton, the next village to Woodham.

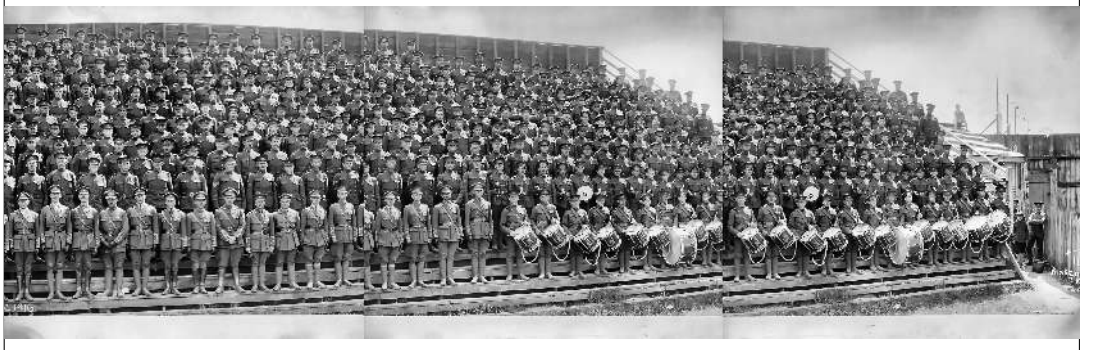


9. *Homer St. John*

A close-up of Homer St. John in the service dress and peaked cap of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, with the maple-leaf badge, compiled by the St. Marys Museum & Archives for a research project in 2014. The photograph it was taken from is not named.



10. *"110th Battalion C.E.F. at London June 1916" (left half)*



11. *The same (right half)*

A panorama of the whole battalion on a tiered wooden stand at London, Ontario, in June 1916: the band with its brass and drums at both ends, the officers seated in the front rank, the companies behind. The caption is written on the negative: "110th Battalion C.E.F. at London June 1916." St. Marys Museum & Archives 975.13.1, scanned in six parts and joined here. Homer St. John, fifteen, who had joined in January, should be among the men; he has not been identified.

The museum's notes ("Research Request — St. John"), in summary. Homer Doble St. John, born 20 March 1900 at Woodham, died 10 September 1972 in California. Grandparents William St. John (1821–1904) and Ann Doble (1823–1889), both buried at Kirkton, with thirteen children, the youngest Philip. Parents Philip St. John (1866–1945), born in Blanshard, and Sarah Hunt (1868–1940), both buried in London, married 16 October 1889 at St. Marys. Homer's sisters and brother: Kathleen Ann (1891–1968), William Frederick "Freddie" Harold (1892–1894), Freda Emeline (1896–1992) and Phyllis Jean Hunt (1908–1996). The farm, Concession 7, Lot 3, Blanshard, bought by William from the Canada Company in 1856, sold to Philip in 1888, and sold by the family to the Copelands in 1919, when they moved to London; today 5905 Line 6, St. Marys. In St. Marys the family rented 23 Peel Street North from J. A. Chesterfield (assessment roll, 1917); in London their first address was 460 Dorinda Street. Homer and Alice were married in Stratford on 4 October 1920 and do not appear in the 1921 census; the museum suspects they went to the United States between 1923 and the early 1930s. Lt. W. J. Wright, principal of the St. Marys high school, signed Homer's enlistment papers. No local newspaper wrote about Homer's service: wartime papers wrote up officers, or the dead and missing.

THE ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs in this chapter are printed digitally restored: dust and scratches removed, noise reduced, contrast evened, nothing added or changed. These are the raw files, as received.



THE 110TH (PERTH) BATTALION AT CAMP BORDEN, 31 AUGUST 1916
The unretouched original.



"110TH BATTALION C.E.F. AT LONDON JUNE 1916" (LEFT HALF)
The unretouched original.



THE SAME (RIGHT HALF)
The unretouched original.



THE 110TH BATTALION AT LONDON, JUNE 1916
The unretouched original.



AFTER A TRENCH RAID, AVION, JULY 1917
The unretouched original.